

National Agenda: Alternative Discipline Consequences to Enhance Student Achievement

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ABSTRACT

Educating the 21st century learner requires utilizing innovative strategies. Student behavior must be addressed appropriately to allow educators to fulfill their responsibility to America's students. Creative disciplinary methods motivate all students to develop behavior traits that will assist them with their academic and personal success.

Students are Vulnerable to Delinquency, Violence and Failure

The topic of student behavior has increasingly become an area of high priority for parents, counselors, teachers and school administrators. Serious violent crimes in school appear to be on a decline in the United States. Unfortunately, the rate of less serious behaviors like theft, bullying, harassment and threats remain the highest of all industrialized countries (Osofsky, 1997.) The drastic surge in sensationalized mass school shootings caused Americans to focus on the problems children have in the family life and communities (Walker & Eaton-Walker, 2000.) In present times, students are more vulnerable to delinquency, violence and failure (Hawkins, et al., 1999; Sprague & Walker, 2000.)

An Investigation of Alternative Disciplinary Consequences

The purpose of this article is to investigate alternative effective disciplinary consequences. Educating the 21st century students entails numerous and somewhat overwhelming challenges. An increasing number of students enter academia with deficits stemming from poverty to language barriers. Nevertheless, schools cannot shirk their responsibility. Schools must educate the ever-changing student with less resources and higher stakes due to state and nationally imposed accountability standards. Schools must be able to meet the challenge of educating all students in an environment that is safe and allows the student to feel secure (Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott, & Hill, 1999.) Historically schools have been viewed as the place to address the ills of society (Mayer, 1995; Walker et al., 1996.)

Parents, counselors, teachers and administrators realize that in order for teachers to be able to effectively and positively impact students instructionally, student behavior management must be executed masterfully. Without successful student behavior management, teacher instruction falters. School instructional leaders are continually researching and probing to find ways to assist teachers in their endeavor to maintain control of their classroom.

In-School Suspension – ISS

In many cases, when teachers are no longer able to manage a student's behavior in their classroom, students are sent to the office to be administered discipline by the campus level administrators. One of the disciplinary consequences utilized by school administrators is (In-School Suspension) ISS. The most extreme incidents result in ISS (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams 1997.)

“Although the use of suspension is an accepted practice by both educators and researchers, its application is often problematic and controversial” (Bloomberg 2004 pg.2) ISS requires students complete a specified assigned instructional day or days in an alternate setting while at their home campus. While in the alternate setting, students receive all of their daily assignments, tests or projects in a classroom reserved for student with an ISS assignment.

The ISS center is a specific staffed room where various behavior changing strategies, ranging from punitive to rehabilitative actions that attempt to stop or

change student misbehavior without having the student removed from the environment. (Bloomberg 2004 pg.2)

Research implies that ISS can be applied in various degrees and forms (Leapley 1997.) Morrison and Skiba define suspension as:

Disciplinary action that is administered as a consequence of a student's inappropriate behavior, requires that a student absent him/herself from the classroom or from the school for a specified period of time. (Morrison and Skiba, 2001 p. 174.)

ISS is administered for varied reasons. When a student's behavior is so disruptive that it impedes the learning of other students, that student may be given ISS. In instances where the safety of the student, other students and/or school personnel has been compromised, ISS may be administered.

ISS stemmed from the frustration of the design of OSS (Bloomberg 2004.) ISS was perceived as "[m]ore rehabilitative model of discipline, which offered positive supports for students" (Bloomberg 2004 pg.5) Often times stakeholders in education do not agree that ISS is an appropriate discipline consequence for severe behavior problems (Turpin & Hardin 1997.)

Little Evidence Exists

Very little evidence exists that supports that ISS has a dramatic impact in changing the discipline climate (Haley 2000; Tomczyk 2000.) An example of the limitations of ISS is as follows:

Tammy Turpin and Dawn Hardin . . . focused on a detailed case study of a rural high school's ISS room. The researchers were dealing with a small school that had an enrollment of 364 students with an approximately half white, half black student population. The ISS room that they occupied had no staff, but instead a camera that monitored the students. The principal and his secretary monitored students using this camera, and intervened when students either spoke to each other or disrupted the ISS room. (Bloomberg 2004 pgs.5-6)

The aforementioned example reveals the following:

Because the school is rural and it is difficult to hire a full time staff member to run the ISS room, the camera is low cost alternative. There is little help or intervention offered, but the room does not act as an effective discipline alternative. Students and teachers both agree that ISS is a real punishment, and that it also functions in making sure students do not get a 'vacation' because of an OSS.(Bloomberg 2004 pg.6)

The entire group of teachers surveyed perceived that the room assisted with classroom discipline. Some students, however, held differing views on its effects. Several students commented to the researcher that ISS was not just a punishment, but also viewed as a place to get caught up on rest (Bloomberg 2004.) Ultimately, "[t]he overall effect on school discipline was negligible" (Bloomberg 2004 pg.6)

Some Noteworthy Cases Perspectives

Noteworthy case studies have been reviewed by large districts to assess the effectiveness of ISS. For instance, a report was completed examining a large district in Des Moines, Iowa. Due to the district's goal to make half of all suspensions in school, ten public middle schools and five public high schools, experienced a reduction in the number of the OSS assignments. The report lists the enthusiasm that several faculty and staff members had towards the initiative. This attitude toward the ISS initiatives helps illustrate the objectives of ISS (Bloomberg 2004.) Persistent concerns regarding the disproportionate number of African-American students being suspended is also causing great distress among the various rungs of school leadership in education. Larry Leapley completed a study advocating the use of I.S.S. (Leapley 1997.)

Leapley succeeded in comparing apples to apples, instead of apples to oranges. His research helps points towards the effectiveness that ISS can have, but does not explain how to improve ISS itself. (Bloomberg 2004 pg.8)

A great concern regarding ISS is overuse. For instance:

Data on suspension and expulsion suggest that the incidents brought to national attention by the media are not all that inaccurate in describing the types of behaviors that lead to exclusion from school. At the middle school level, disrespect and disobedience are among the most common reasons for suspension, and a significant proportion of suspensions are for tardiness and truancy. In one of the few reported studies of school expulsion in American education, Gale Morrison and Barbara D'Incau reported that the majority of offenses in the sample they investigated were committed by students who would not generally be considered dangerous to the school environment. (Skiba and Peterson 1999 pg.8)

School administrators resort to suspensions and expulsions when they do not know what else to do. There is a wealth of preventive alternatives that have been found to be effective when utilized to improve school discipline and reduce school disruptions and reduce violence (Skiba and Peterson 2003.)

Some Proven Alternative Techniques and Strategies

Some proven alternative techniques that have been successfully utilized are Intervention Rooms, Classroom Management Training, Safe Schools TV Show, Parent Newsletters, Lifeskills, Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) Curriculum, Civility Themes, Alternatives to Out-of-School Suspension, The Code, Civility Curriculum, Out of Classroom Intervention (OCI), Beatrice After School Education school (BASE), Bullying Prevention, Resource Book, and Monitoring Program (Skiba and Peterson 2003.) The common threads of all of these programs is to “. . . enable schools and school districts to develop a broader perspective on school safety.” (Skiba and Peterson 2003 pg.71) These programs also seek to stress “. . . comprehensive planning, prevention, and parent and community involvement” (Skiba and Peterson 2003 pg.71)

Goals of the program have been to

. . . increase the knowledge base of teachers and administrators concerning what works in discipline and violence prevention and to develop a comprehensive model of systems change in school discipline. Skiba and Peterson 2003 pg.71)

Schools utilizing the aforementioned disciplinary strategies showed favorable gains at the completion of the first year of implementation. Schools showed declines in out-of-school suspensions. For instance, “. . . the first five pilot schools in the state of Indiana, out-of-school suspensions for the entire school showed a decline ranging from 40% to 60%” (Skiba and Peterson 2003 pg.71)

Other student populations, such as special education students were impacted in a positive manner:

Gains extended as well to students with disabilities. One middle school showed a drop from 39 suspensions for students with disabilities in 1999-2000 to 0 in 2000-2001.(Skiba and Peterson 2003 pg. 71)

One school made a particularly noteworthy observation: “It is instructive to highlight the experience of one participating school: Owen Valley High School in rural Spencer, Indiana.” (Skiba and Peterson 2003 pg.71) This school’s planning team observed that there were a huge number of office referrals for minor behavior infractions. Staff members commented on the number of students lined up to see administrators. This school responded with the implementation of an Intervention Room. Students were to go a designated area prior to the office referral. Students had to meet with the Intervention Room Teacher before going to the office. “Sometimes a simple problem, such as a lack of materials, can be solved and the student (could) return immediately to his or her classroom” (Skiba and Peterson 2003 pg.72) This school experienced a positive relationship between positive discipline and academic excellence.

In the 2001-2002 school year, Owen Valley High School was one of six school in the nation that won the prestigious New American High School Award from the U.S. Department of Education in recognition for its reform efforts and increased academic excellence. (Skiba and Peterson 2003 pg.72)

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, educating the 21st century learner is a daunting task. Schools must posture themselves with all available resources to meet the challenge. In order to thrive in school and glean all that is need for instruction, student behavior must be addressed appropriately. Educators must think out of the box and seek out creative innovative strategies to motivate all students to develop behavior traits that will assist them with their holistic personal success.

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